

13 Steps to Graduating with Honors or High Honors in Psychology or Neuroscience at Colgate University

So, you'd like to do an honors thesis? Below are guidelines that the Psychology Department and Neuroscience Program have developed to give you an idea of what you are taking on, and--we hope--to help you stay on track along your research journey.

Step 1: Find a Research Advisor

Suggested timeframe: Early in the spring semester of your junior year

What to do: Use what you know about the research going on in the department, along with the department webpage, to get an idea of which faculty member(s) have research interests that are similar to yours. Feel free to e-mail or meet with faculty to discuss the honors process.

Step 2: Respond to Research Placement Questionnaire

Suggested timeframe: When you receive an e-mail requesting that you do so, in late February or early March before spring break

What to do: Report what you have learned from Step 1 on the questionnaire. The department's research coordinator will match you with the faculty member best suited to supervise your project.

Step 3: Discuss Project Possibilities with Research Advisor

Suggested timeframe: Toward the end of your junior year, over the summer, or at the start of your senior year

What to do: Learn more about your faculty advisor's recent research. Listen to his or her suggestions for your honors work. Discuss research ideas that fall within your faculty advisor's area of expertise. Consider whether you would like to collaborate with other students on your honors project. You might meet with your advisor in person or discuss these issues by e-mail.

Step 4: Develop Research Question

Suggested timeframe: First few weeks of senior year

What to do: Set up a one-hour regular meeting time with your researcher advisor and collaborators (if any) to brainstorm ideas. Read research done on the problem(s) you are considering. Narrow down and evaluate potential ideas. *This phase requires a lot of independent work, and roughly 10 hours a week of reading journal articles is the norm.*

Step 5: Design Study

Suggested timeframe: Immediately following Step 4 - consult with your research advisor

What to do: Decide on the study design and methodology you will use. This process varies by research area and so you will need to work closely with your faculty advisor

through this process. Some advisors will require you to write a proposal abstract that summarizes the plan for your study.

Step 6: Find a Second Advisor

Suggested timeframe: By the 4th week of your senior year

What to do: Together with your faculty advisor, identify another faculty member in the department that will provide additional guidance on your study. In some cases, faculty outside our department can be useful co-advisors. In such cases, students are encouraged to consult with such faculty. However, each project should also have a 2nd advisor who is in the Psychology Department or Neuroscience Program.

Step 7: Seek Appropriate Approvals

Suggested timeframe: By deadlines set by appropriate committee

What to do: Draft a proposal to have the Institutional Review Board (IRB) or the Animal Use Committee review your research. You can find the guidelines on the Psychology Department's "[Resources for Student Researchers](#)" web page. Your advisor will review drafts that you prepare before submission.

Step 8: Meet with your Second Advisor

Suggested timeframe: By the 4th week of your senior year

What to do: Informally present the preliminary plans for your study. Some faculty will request that you send them something in writing. Your second advisor will be an important resource for you as you plan your study. Take his or her perspective into consideration as you finalize your methodology and begin conducting your study. Consult with your 2nd advisor about any aspect of your honors project that you have questions or concerns about.

Step 9: Start your Research Paper

Suggested timeframe: Usually by end of first semester of senior year (consult your advisor).

What to do: Thoroughly review the literature, and prepare a document that includes an introduction, method, sections along with an APA style reference list. Your advisor will give you more information about the specific requirements for this document. Share this document with your primary and second advisors and revise according to their suggestions.

Step 10: Conduct Research

Suggested timeframe: Varies by research area; may take up to 20 hrs/wk for 3-4 weeks.

What to do: Prepare research materials, stimuli, programs, etc. Write the script for administering the study. Collect and analyze your data. In some cases, honors theses will involve conducting a second study. For many students, this will take place before Step 9. *Unless the project requires it, students are not expected to work on*

weekends and breaks. Of course, if you choose to work during those times, this is fine.

Step 11: Finish Research Paper

Suggested timeframe: By the end of the 13th week of the spring semester of your senior year

What to do: Prepare a full APA style research report describing your research. Your advisor may have you submit sections one at a time and will provide feedback and assistance as needed. Both your primary and second advisors need to approve this paper prior to your honors presentation, and the second reader may ask for changes to the paper.

Step 12: Present to Department

Suggested timeframe: Wednesday of finals week of the spring semester of your senior year

What to do: Prepare a 15-minute Power Point presentation summarizing your research. Practice your presentation to check the timing and polish your delivery. Honors students often practice with each other to offer feedback. Be prepared to answer questions from faculty in the department following your presentation. The questions will likely address the specifics of your study, as well as the implications of your findings and the broader literature your study has addressed.

If you successfully complete these steps, you will graduate with Honors or High Honors depending on your overall GPA and GPA within the major, based on the guidelines presented in the catalog.

Step 13: Celebrate!